

News Release



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California Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Commission Awards \$200,000 for Statewide Snowy Plover Recovery Program

California's Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Commission awarded \$200,000 to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to conduct snowy plover monitoring programs in lands adjoining Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area and in other recovery units of the state.

The grant represents the first time in the Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Program's 30 year history that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been awarded off-highway vehicle funds for the benefit of wildlife research and management.

Snowy plovers, a species listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act since 1993, as well as the endangered California least tern, nest on the bare sands within Oceano Dunes. The California Department of Parks and Recreation has maintained a substantial monitoring program at Oceano Dunes for both the western snowy plover and California least tern since the early 1990's. A draft recovery plan prepared by the USFWS recognized State Parks for those efforts, stating that the monitoring program serves as a model for the development of other such programs in State Park managed areas.

The USFWS said with the intense public and regulatory scrutiny faced by State Parks in its management of Oceano Dunes, it is of mutual interest to both the department and the USFWS to provide support for recovery plan efforts throughout the state that are consistent with those that are underway at Oceano Dunes.

The monitoring program grant, approved at the OHV Commission's February 13, 2002 meeting in Sacramento, is a key element of that recovery plan. It is also expected to have statewide benefit, as the grant will also fund monitoring efforts in recovery units in Humboldt County and Monterey Bay.

State Parks Deputy Director David L. Widell, emphasizing the far-reaching importance of the program and the Commission's action, said, "Contrary to popular myth, the future of the snowy plover does not begin or end at the boundaries of Oceano Dunes. It is well documented that Oceano Dunes is doing its part, and more. It is now time that we all look well beyond San Luis Obispo County to other coastal areas if this species is to be protected. This grant helps us

take an important step toward that goal and reveals that off-highway vehicle recreation funds can help protect wildlife and, in turn, sustain managed off-highway recreation,” said Widell, who directs State Parks’ Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division.

Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes National Wildlife Refuge Manager Chris Barr said that the issue is how to best balance California’s growing recreation needs, motorized and non-motorized, and protect and aid in the recovery of threatened and endangered species.

Barr said the partnership will provide benefits through monitoring, public education and increased law enforcement.

Specifically, the program will:

- Enhance western snowy plover monitoring and banding programs to help determine chick fledging rates in recovery areas adjoining Oceano Dunes, Samoa Peninsula in Humboldt County and at Monterey Bay.
- Establish a western snowy plover working group as recommended in the draft recovery plan for the species.
- Develop and implement a western snowy plover educational program, including related support materials, for the entire Guadalupe-Nipomo dunes recovery area.
- Establish western snowy plover and other threatened and endangered species oriented interpretive and informational kiosks, consistent with those found at Oceano Dunes, at specified locations within the wildlife refuge and other recovery units.

Plovers--small, pale-colored shorebirds with dark patches on either side of the upper breast--are not limited to California’s central coast. The coastal population, of which the USFWS says roughly 2,000 birds remain, breeds along the Pacific coast from southern Washington to southern Baja California, Mexico. The breeding season extends from early March to late September.

Oceano Dunes is one of California’s most popular State Parks, attracting more than 1.2 million visitors annually—more than the famed Hearst Castle—and represents the last 5-½ miles of beach along California’s 1,100 miles of coastline where motorized recreation is still allowed.

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